

## Writing Instructional Techniques

### *Quick Writes*

#### What it is--

At specific points during teaching, students stop and reflect in writing on the activities happening or information being presented. Some quick sharing either with partners or the whole class usually follows this writing.

#### When to use it and why--

By incorporating quick writes at regular intervals, about every 10-20 minutes, you can increase content retention because writing and then talking about it moves the retention rate into the 70-90% range.

#### Planning--

When lesson-planning, think about any presentations, video, activities, or in-class reading your students will be engaged in and decide when students might stop and write.

#### Examples--

Your prompts might be general:

- What piece of information stands out and seems really important? Why?
- What does this remind you of?
- What questions do you still have?
- What makes sense? What is still confusing you?

Or specific to your content:

- Which character's actions surprised you the most?
- What would you do if you faced this problem?
- What might have happened if Theodore Roosevelt had not overtaken construction of the Panama Canal from France?
- How would you describe the relationship between the angle measures of the following polygons?

## ***Admit/Exit Slips***

### What it is--

Save the first 1-5 minutes or last 1-5 minutes of class for students to write about the most important things they have learned, or writing questions about the content presented so far, or a combination of these.

### When to use it and why--

This technique gives you updated information about student learning. It is also a useful reflective check for students. Information from admit/exit slips can provide guidance on what to emphasize in instruction and what needs clarification.

### Planning--

Reserve time either at the beginning or end of class and provide some sort of means for students to submit their admit/exit slips (index cards, back of paper, etc.) You can offer one prompt or have students choose from 3-5 options. As with quick writes, these can be general or specific to the content.

### Examples--

- What did you learn today?
  - How is this unit going for you?
  - What was the most difficult or confusing idea we learned today? Why?
  - Pick one quote or phrase from today's class discussion/readings and comment on it.
  - What are some questions you have about today's lesson? Where do you think you can get answers to these questions?
  - Predict what we will learn next in this unit and why.
  - What would you like me to review today (or tomorrow) in class? Why?
  - If you were going to teach this to someone else, what would be in your notes? Show me!
  - If you were going to make up an essay test question based on today's class, what would it be, and what would a good answer look like?
  - What do you need to concentrate on to finish this unit successfully? What goals can you set for yourself?
  - What can I do to help you learn better in class? Please be specific.
  - Etc.
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- Of the 3 main causes of the Civil War, what do you think is the most important and why?
  - Name 3 good qualities of a president and why they matter.
  - How could this formula be applied in a real-life situation?
  - Find some examples of math or numerical evidence being used in the media and explain.

- Our textbook says that global warming may be caused by human activity or may be part of a natural cycle of variations. Which theory do you believe and why?
- How has the technology changed within the past 10 years?
- Describe the physical environment in which you would most like to live.
- What benefits are there to studying a foreign language? Give at least 3 specific examples.
- Why do you think that the public would choose to censor art? Do you think that there are ever situations where censorship is necessary?
- Pick a musician that you enjoy; pick another musician that you dislike. List and support your reasons for your differing evaluations.
- Etc.

## ***Brainstorming***

### What it is--

Asking students to take a quick inventory of what they know or think they know about something, writing down everything that comes to mind, even if they are not sure if it is correct.

### When to use it and why--

Written brainstorming is a quick and useful tool that can be applied at almost any point in a lesson or reading assignment. It's an excellent way to get students started on a new topic by tapping into their prior knowledge. Besides dealing directly with content, brainstorming is an excellent tool for examining multiple solutions for any problem--real or fictional.

### Planning--

When lesson planning, determine the goal for brainstorming--checking prior knowledge, reviewing material, connecting content to events outside the classroom, correcting previous misconceptions, etc. Give students a topic and a minute or two to brainstorm individually. Next, have them share with a partner, extending their list by writing down ideas they hadn't thought of previously.

### Examples--

- One of the settings in "The Hound of the Baskervilles" is a moor. A moor is a swampy area that can look deceptively firm. What places have you been that fit this description?
- You have decided to run a 5K in two months. List all of the things you will need to consider for your training plan.



## ***Drawing and Illustrating***

### What it is--

Students make quick drawings, sketches, or diagrams to illustrate ideas, events, science experiments, real-world situations involving content, etc. in order to help themselves and others understand something they are trying to learn. These illustrations usually include words in the form of explanations, labels, or lists of terms and ideas. These need not be highly artistic--they may be stick figures or abstract representations of ideas as well as illustrations of actual scenes or objects.

### When to use it and why--

Drawings help most students, especially visual learners, to understand complex ideas. When we express an idea in a different mode than we first learned it, we notice new things. When students draw or sketch, even for just a few minutes, they are better able to digest and remember a concept.

### Planning--

Decide which concepts can be further explained through drawing or sketching. They might be used at the beginning of a class to focus or review topics, or they may contribute to a whole-class diagram.

### Examples--

There are many ways for students to express an idea in multiple dimensions other than reading or writing. Students could:

- Use cartoons to represent a historical situation or event, a conflict, or a controversy.
- Cartoons can help math students write out explanations of the steps in solving problems.
- Timelines can help students visualize the flow of events in history.
- Abstract sketches can help students explore concepts by inviting both written and oral explanation.
- Storyboards can demonstrate the sequence of stories, problems, or procedures.

## ***Summary Statements***

### What it is--

Summary statements provide an opportunity for students to synthesize and bring information together. It can include multiple ideas from a lesson, experiences and text information, background knowledge and new information. A summary statement allows the student to reflect on the most important ideas or concepts from class.

### When to use it and why--

Asking students to summarize ideas builds understanding and brings to the surface any misunderstandings and misconceptions. It also helps students make their own connections and raise questions about the reading or learning experience. Transforming a summary into writing requires additional thought about the material, and the written record can be reviewed, reworked, and revised. This analysis will improve comprehension of the information being summarized.

### Planning--

Summaries can be short (words, 1-2 sentences) building to paragraphs and essays that synthesize key concepts being studied. When lesson planning, consider opportunities when multiple ideas have been presented. These ideas may be from the text, discussions, artifacts, or personal experiences. Provide a time for students to pull ideas together in a written summary that creates new information.

### Examples--

- MVP--Go back to your notes and star the 3 most valuable points from today's learning.
- Keep a double entry journal that presents key ideas with a summary of significance to the unit of study.
- Cubing--
  - Describe it (concept, idea being studied, topic, issue, etc.)
  - Compare it (similar, different, remind of)
  - Associate it (what does it make you think of, connections, memories)
  - Analyze it (How can the problem/issue/topic be broken down)
  - Apply it (How is this used, how does it help you understand other ideas)
  - Argue for/against it (Why would you support this/argue against this)
- Sum it up--write a Twitter feed--you can only use 140 characters or fewer
- GIST--writing a summary statement in 15 words or less
- One-Word Summaries
  - Following a day's lesson (or reading), ask students to write one word that best summarizes the topic.
  - After identifying the word, each student should write a brief explanation (a sentence or two) that explains the word choice.
  - Students share their word choices and explanations.

### References

"Writing Matters in Every Classroom" by Angela Peery, Ed.D.  
"Content-Area Writing: Every Teacher's Guide" by Harvey Daniels

